

STATEMENT OF JANET MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 323, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING THE FRENCH COLONIAL HERITAGE AREA IN THE STATE OF MISSOURI AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

March 15, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on S. 323, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating the French Colonial Heritage Area in the State of Missouri as a unit of the National Park System.

While the Department is supportive of S. 323, with the minor clarification provided in this testimony, we believe that available funding should be first directed toward completing previously authorized studies. Currently, 31 studies are in progress, and we hope to complete and transmit 19 to Congress by the end of calendar year 2005.

S. 323 would authorize the Secretary to complete a study on the suitability and feasibility of designating the French Colonial Heritage Area as a unit of the National Park System. The French Colonial Heritage Area (Area) includes the Bequette-Ribault, St. Gemme-Amoureux, and Wilhawk homes, and the related and supporting historical assets in Ste. Genevieve County, Missouri. The Area contains some of the only existing examples of the French Colonial Period settlement, including two of the five poteaux-en-terre (post-in-the-ground) vertical log French buildings remaining in North America, dating from circa 1785, in addition

to several other important historical resources. The Area is located within the expanded boundaries of Ste. Genevieve National Historic District (District), a National Historic Landmark. No current National Park System unit has comparable historic features providing the cultural backdrop required to adequately interpret the story of the early French in the New World.

In April 1980, the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service completed a brief Reconnaissance Report of Ste. Genevieve Historic District. The Reconnaissance Report reviewed the District's cultural, natural, scenic, and recreational resources as well as ownership patterns and possible threats to the District. The Reconnaissance Report will provide valuable background information should this legislation be enacted authorizing a more in-depth study of suitability and feasibility, which includes a review of management alternatives.

The Department would like to work with the Committee to clarify some potentially confusing language in the bill. While the bill authorizes a study on the suitability and feasibility of designating a new unit of the National Park System, it also identifies the study area as the "French Colonial Heritage Area." A national heritage area differs from a unit of the National Park Service in a number of different ways, most notably is that a national heritage area is locally driven and does not include management by the National Park Service, whereas a unit is managed wholly or in part by the National Park Service.

If the intent of the bill only is to study the area for potential designation as a national heritage area, we recommend amending the bill to authorize a feasibility study to examine such

designation. If the intent is to study the area for potential inclusion as a new National Park System unit, or if it is unclear which type of designation is desired, the bill should be clarified by eliminating the references to the term “heritage area”. A suitability and feasibility study to designate an Area as a unit will examine a range of alternatives, including whether a national heritage area designation is more appropriate than creating a new unit. We will be happy to work with the subcommittee to develop clarifying language prior to enactment of this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.